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ABSTRACT

Boys Town cares for boys and girls (average age 15 years) who are socially and emotionally at risk because of problems such as chronic neglect or abuse, broken homes, and school failure. The majority are behaviorally disordered and emotionally impaired. Within a week of coming to Boys Town, students take the Diagnostic Assessments of Reading Test. Results show that 35% are below grade level in oral reading, and the majority are below grade level in word recognition, silent reading comprehension, and knowledge of word meanings. The Boys Town Reading Curriculum extends the principles of one-to-one tutoring to group instruction and consists of four courses, each a semester long. The curriculum is designed for older adolescents at various levels of reading development. Factors responsible for the curriculum's success include: students are placed in courses appropriate to their reading needs; the courses are highly structured; the curriculum makes sense and provides them with hope; and students' success is defined as much by how much they learn as by how well they perform. (Contains 24 references and 3 tables of data. A 29-item list of novels used in 2 classes is attached.) (RS)

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Reversing Reading Failure in Adolescents With Behavioral Disorders

Mary E. Curtis and Ann Marie Longo

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CEC Annual Convention

Orlando, Florida

April, 1996

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Profile of Boys Town Youth

Boys Town cares for boys and girls who are socially and emotionally at risk because of problems such as chronic neglect or abuse, broken homes, and school failure. The residential/educational program on Boys Town's home campus is the setting for the reading program described here.

Students' average age is 15 (range from 8 to 18 years).

About 60% are male, about 40% are minority.

Most have average IQs (range from 55 to 135).

Boys Town is their 3rd out-of-home placement.

They stay at Boys Town for 18-22 months.

About 50% have a history of academic failure.

The majority are behaviorally disordered and emotionally impaired (as measured by the CBCL).

Reading Skills of Boys Town Youth

Within a week of coming to Boys Town, students take the Diagnostic Assessments of Reading (DAR) Test. The DAR is an individually administered, criterion-referenced test used to measure reading ability. Thus far, the DAR has been given to more than 1000 Boys Town Youth.

Results from the DAR show that:

- 35% of youth are below grade level in oral reading.
- 50% are below grade level in word recognition.
- almost 60% are below grade level in silent reading comprehension.
- nearly 75% are below grade level in knowledge of word meanings.
- students' average oral reading rate is very slow (about 100 words per minute).

Overview to Boys Town's Curriculum

Although most students who come to Boys Town are 2 to 3 years behind in reading, some are as far as 5 to 6 years.

We needed a curriculum that would help students at several different points along a continuum of reading development, ranging from the ability to identify words in print, all the way up to the ability to analyze what is read, and to use reading as a way to acquire new concepts and points of view.

The Boys Town Reading Curriculum extends the principles of one-to-one tutoring to group instruction. We do this because it is cost effective. But we also do this because it allows us to teach reading right alongside the interpersonal skills that are so critical for our students' future academic success.

The curriculum consists of four courses, each a semester long, enabling students to complete the full curriculum (if necessary) within the average length of stay at Boys Town.

The content of each of the courses reflects the students' current level of reading development and the level to which they need to go next.

Boys Town Reading Curriculum

The curriculum is designed for older adolescents at various levels of reading development.

Foundations of Reading (below 4th grade level):

The most common letter-sound correspondences are taught and collaborative oral reading of novels is used to promote application of word-analysis skills.

Adventures in Reading (4th - 6th grade levels):

Students' fluency in recognizing words and their meanings is promoted via software, games, and collaborative oral reading.

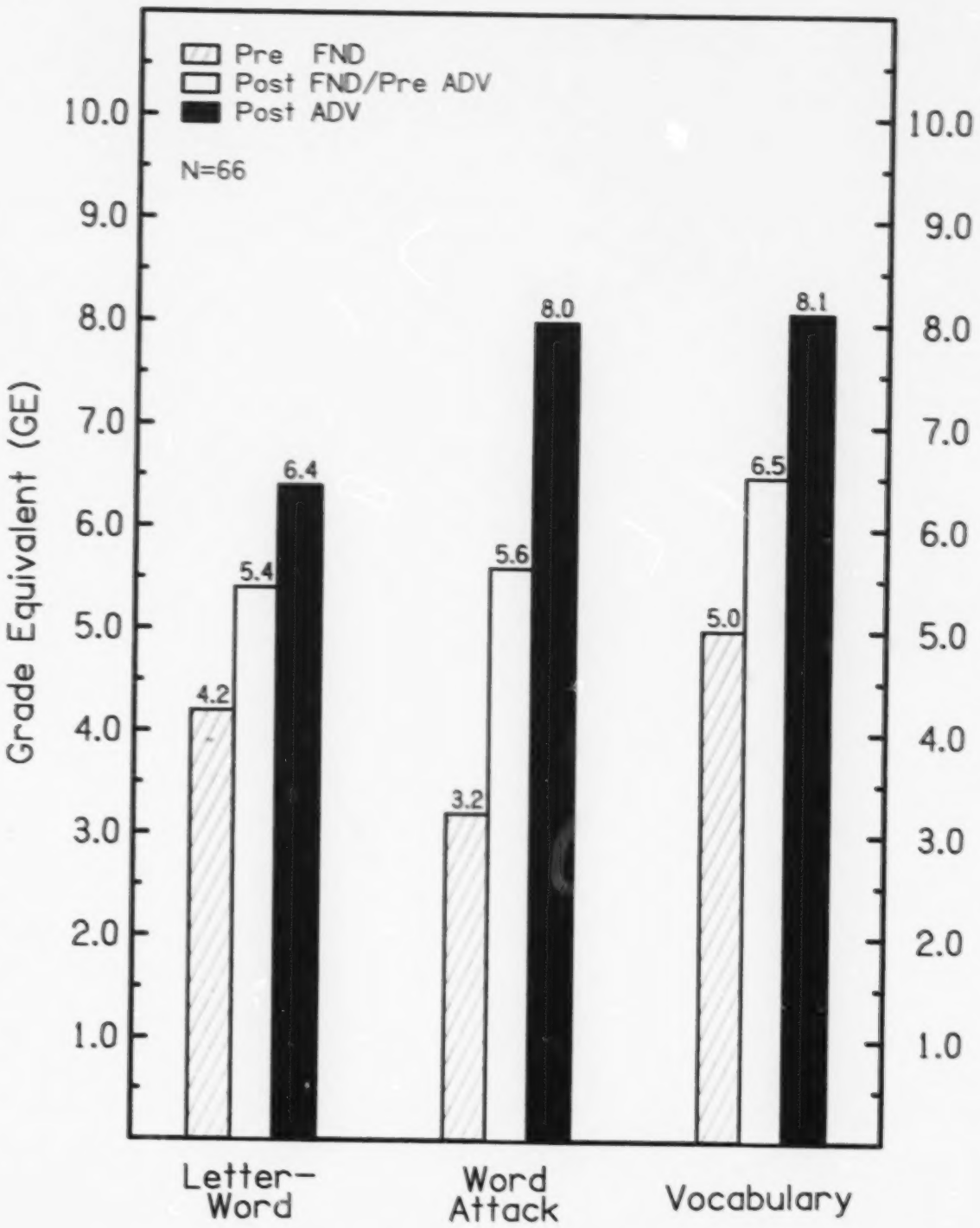
Mastery of Meaning (6th - 8th grade levels):

Students are provided with multiple opportunities to process new words, concepts, and topics in active and generative ways.

Explorations (8th grade and beyond):

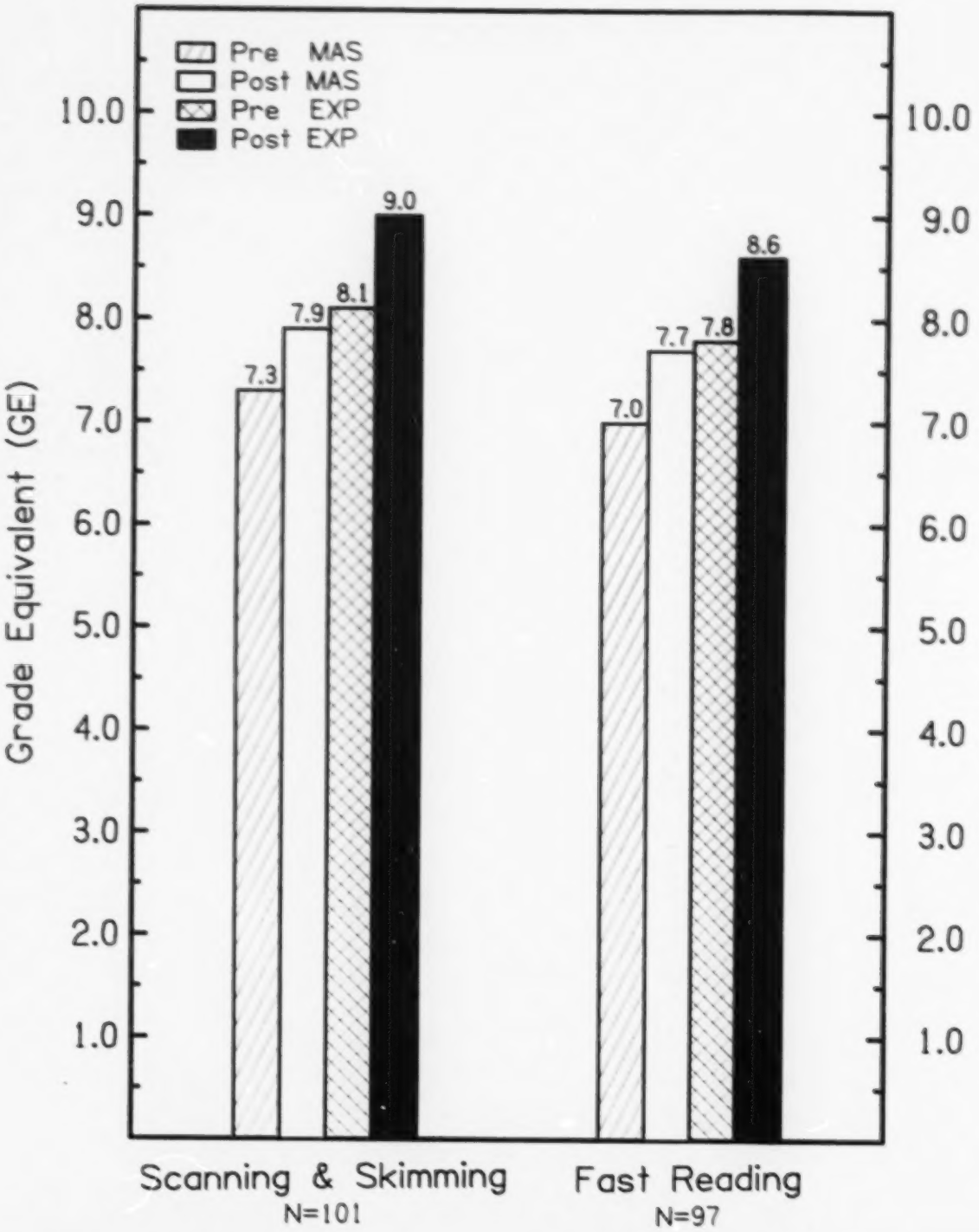
Study skills are taught in the context of content materials. Via software and reading and writing activities, students' ability to integrate information in text is emphasized.

Foundations & Adventures Results



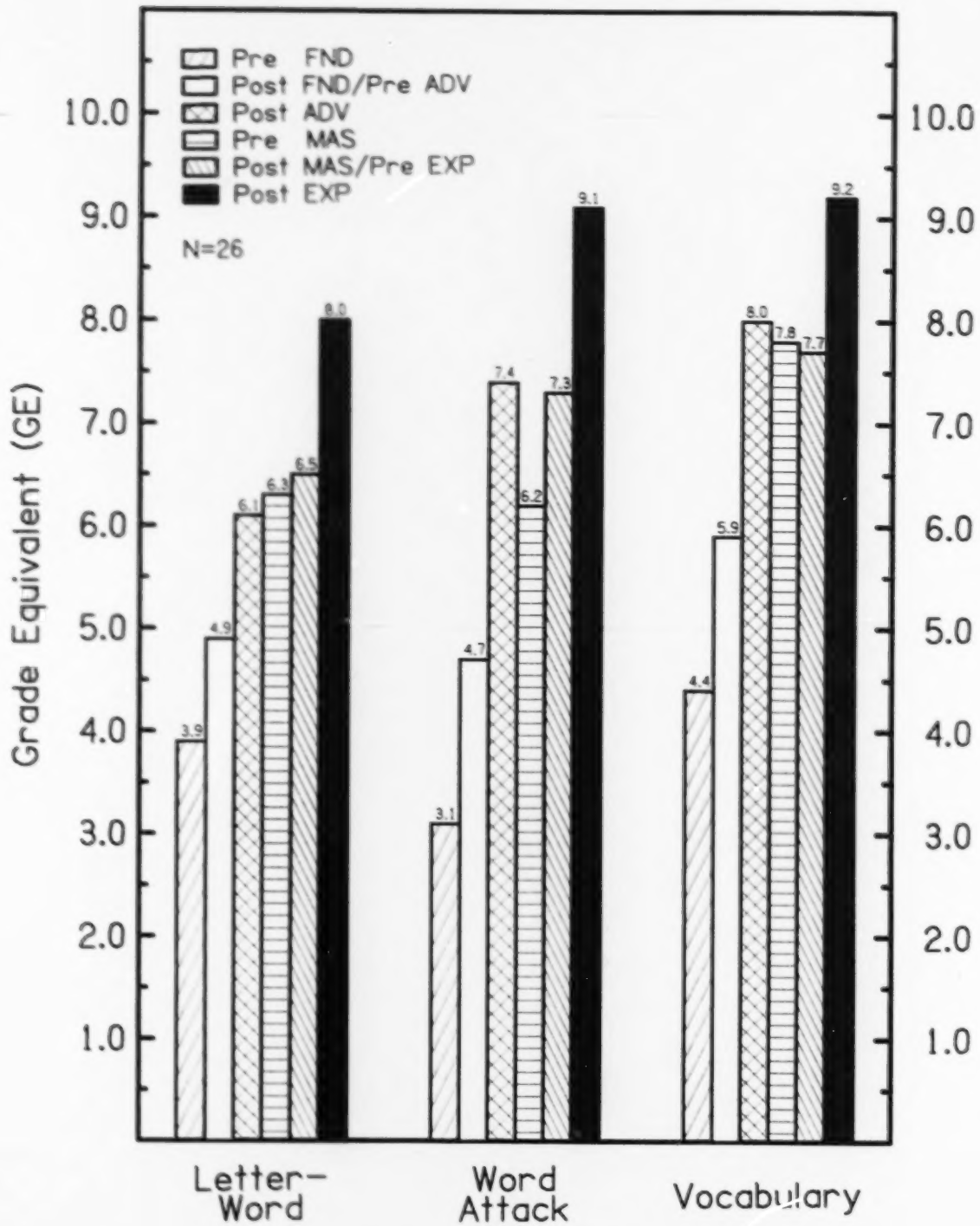
(Subtests from the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised)

Mastery & Explorations Results



(Subtests from the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, 3rd Edition)

Longitudinal Results



(Subtests from the Woodcock-Johnson Psycho-Educational Battery-Revised)

What Makes Boys Town's Curriculum Work?

We believe several factors are responsible for the curriculum's success:

Students are placed in courses appropriate to their reading needs, and teachers focus on the content needed to maximize reading growth at each level.

The courses are highly structured, providing a sense of control for students and promoting their willingness to take risks in their reading.

Courses are fast-paced, and activities are fun.

For students who feel that remedial reading can be a "black hole", the curriculum makes sense and provides them with hope.

Students' success in the curriculum is defined as much by how much they learn as by how well they perform. Students are continually challenged, and as they begin to see growth, their motivation increases.

Boys Town Reading Curriculum

A List of Resources

Achenbach, T.M. (1991). Manual for child behavior checklist/4-18 and 1991 profile. Burlington, VT: University of Vermont Department of Psychiatry.

Billings, H. & Billings, M. (1984). Phenomena. Heroes. Disasters. Eccentrics. Providence, RI: Jamestown.

Chall, J.S., & Curtis, M.E. (1992). Teaching the disabled or below- average reader. In S.J. Samuels & A.E. Farstrup (Ed.), What research has to say about reading instruction (pp. 253-76). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Cochran, J.A. (1993). Reading in the content areas for junior high and high school. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Code Quest (1988). Pleasantville, NY: Sunburst.

Curtis, M.E. (1996). Intervention for adolescents "at-risk". In L.R. Putnam (Ed.), How to be a better reading teacher. Columbus, OH: Macmillan.

Curtis, M.E. & McCart, L. (1992). Fun ways to promote poor readers' word recognition. Journal of Reading, 35 (5), 398-399.

Furbach, P.M., Ross, E.A., & Durrell, D.D. (1990). Thirty lessons in outlining. North Billerica, MA: Curriculum Associates.

Goodman, B. (1993). Conflicts. Providence, RI: Jamestown.

Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia (1993). Danbury, CT: Grolier Inc.

<in COMMON> (1991). Pleasantville, NY: Sunburst.

Johnson, K., & Bayrd, P. (1986). Megawords: Multisyllabic words for reading, spelling, and vocabulary. Cambridge, MA: Educational Publishing Service.

M-ss-ng L-nks: Young people's literature. (1988). Pleasantville, NY: Sunburst.

Marshall, K. (1984). Reading. Cambridge, MA: Educational Publishing Service.

McKeown, M.G., & Curtis, M.E. (1987). The nature of vocabulary acquisition. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Mikulecky, B.S. (1990). A short course in teaching reading skills. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Nist, S.L., & Molir, C. (1990). Improving vocabulary skills. Marlton, NJ: Townsend.

Pirie, J., & Pirie, A. (1990). Thirty lessons in note-taking. North Billerica, MA: Curriculum Associates.

Roswell, F.G., & Chall, J.S. (1994). Creating successful readers: A practical guide to testing and teaching at all levels. Chicago: Riverside.

Roswell, F.G. & Chall, J.S. (1992). Diagnostic assessments of reading. Chicago: Riverside.

Spell It Plus! (1991). Torrance, CA: Davidson & Associates.

Voice of Youth Advocates (VOYA). Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press.

Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego? (1989). Novato, CA: Broderbund.

Word Attack Plus! (1991). Torrance, CA: Davidson & Associates.

Novels Used in Boys Town Reading Curriculum Classes
(Updated Spring 1996)

Foundations of Reading

Bearstone - Will Hobbs
The Blizzard - Jim O'Connor
Canyons - Gary Paulsen
Death Grip - Jay Bennett
Devil's Arithmetic - Jane Yolen
A Family Apart - Joan Lowery Nixon
A Fine White Dust - Cynthia Rylant
Freedom Crossing - Margaret Clark
Letters from Rifka - Karen Hesse
Maniac Magee - Jerry Spinelli
Missing May - Cynthia Rylant
My Daniel - Pam Conrad
Shark Beneath the Reef - Jean Craighead George
Skeleton Man - Jay Bennett
Summer of the Swan - Betsy Byars
Trapped in Death Cave - Bill Wallace
The Trouble With Lemons - Daniel Hayes
The Winter Room - Gary Paulson
Why the Whales Came - Michael Morpurgo
Woodsong - Gary Paulsen

Adventures in Reading

Children of the River - Linda Crew
Dicey's Song - Cynthia Voigt
Escape From Warsaw - Ian Serraillier
Flight #116 Is Down - Caroline B. Cooney
Land of Hope - Joan Lowery Nixon
Lyddie - Katherine Paterson
The Shadow Brothers - A.E. Cannon
Sign of the Chrysanthemum - Katherine Paterson
The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle - Avi